

BREAKING

GROUND

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**IN THIS
ISSUE:**

**MY SON
WANTED
A JOB**

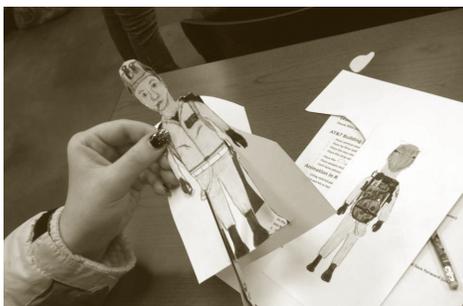


TENNESSEE COUNCIL
on developmental disabilities

CONTENTS



- 2 Wesley Works Because a Teenager Wanted a Job
- 3 Igniting the Dream of Education
- 5 Disability Employment Initiative is Putting People to Work
- 6 A Matter of Choice: A Letter From a Partners Grad
- 7 Architects For a Day
- 9 Applications Being Accepted for Partners in Policymaking™
- 10 Training the Front Line:
A Developmental Disabilities Workshop for
Child Protective Services
- 11 TRIAD's Community Engagement Initiative
- 13 Q & A with John Harris
- 15 To Conservatorship or not to Conservatorship
- 17 TN Spotlight
- 18 Bob Kibler: A Dedicated Advocate





WESLEY WORKS

by Christi Rice

BECAUSE A TEENAGER WANTED A JOB

My 17-year-old son, Wesley, who happens to have intellectual and developmental disabilities, wanted a job. So we found one.

It all started with a special trial work day organized by Open Doors TN - a non-profit organization dedicated to providing opportunities to families that experience disability - this past summer in Knoxville. A local sandwich shop "opened its doors" to give folks with disabilities an opportunity to work and earn a paycheck for one day. Wesley was so excited at the idea of working a job and getting paid to do so. We showed up and he worked. He worked hard. He did anything he was asked to do and was a bright spot in the day of many customers during the lunch rush.

I watched his self-confidence explode. I watched my son open the hearts and minds of the other employees and customers. It was a priceless moment in time.

He worked on a Thursday, and from that moment on he expected that he was going to work every Thursday. I was desperate to find a real job for him, to find someone willing to give him a chance, so he could have a job like many other teenagers in our community. I began talking to people about wanting to find a business that would give him this opportunity. He only needed a few hours a week and I was willing to assist him in any way necessary to help him be successful.

I was ready to start knocking on doors and introducing my son, a teenager who wanted a job, who just happened to have I/DD. Thanks to my sister we found that business. We found Alan Sims, the owner of Menchie's, a frozen yogurt shop. He was willing to give Wesley a chance.

Wesley went for an interview a few days later. He looked at Mr. Sims and said, "I really want this job". Long story short: he's been working at Menchie's since July. He has not called in sick once; he looks forward to his shifts with a smile on his face, and has even mastered the cash register. You can find him there on Thursday and Sunday afternoons selling smiles and maybe

some frozen yogurt too. All because someone was willing to give him a chance.

Through the process of teaching Wesley the skills required for his job, and the interactions Wesley has had with other team members and guests of Menchie's, an amazing opportunity has evolved. When Alan Sims hired my son, he took the time himself to train him, to introduce him to the other team members, to get to know him and to make sure that this was successful for the business and for Wesley. The effect Wesley has had on the other team members and guests caused Alan Sims to consider how he could provide more opportunities for employment in our community for young adults with disabilities.

We have teamed up with Open Doors Tennessee, the organization that started this journey we've been on. In order to provide more employment opportunities, we are using the Menchie's location in Brookview Center as our first location that will actively hire and train young adults with disabilities. We have already hired a few more team members with different abilities. They each come to work with their own individual strengths and gifts. The joy of having something that is all their own, just like their typical peers, is priceless. The amount of self-confidence it builds is immeasurable. Each one is learning a skill, performing that skill, and being paid just as any other Menchie's team member.

We consider this just a first step, so please stay tuned for more exciting employment happenings in the Knoxville area, and maybe beyond. Our goal is to provide numerous opportunities for young adults with disabilities to have a job, and to learn skills based on their own unique abilities and interests. We want to promote independence and a sense of purpose through employment.

We believe that everyone deserves the chance to work, and to become a productive, contributing member of society, however they are able.

Igniting the Dream of EDUCATION

by Kyle Dickerson, IDEAL Program Coordinator

What does the future hold? It's a question we've all considered and a testament to our desire as humans to move forward in life. For a group of students in Middle Tennessee, that question is taking on an entirely new meaning.

In January of 2012, a vision was formed for a program that would allow college-age students with intellectual and developmental disabilities to fully experience college on Lipscomb University's Nashville campus. Twenty-four months later, in January of 2014, the first students enrolled in Lipscomb's IDEAL program walked onto campus to begin their journey.

IDEAL: Igniting the Dream of Education and Access at Lipscomb, under the guidance of the College of Education, has been developed as a two-year certificate program, accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. It offers academic, social and vocational skills training for students with documented intellectual and developmental disabilities between the ages of 18 and 26. The goal is for IDEAL students to not only gain a college experience and education, but also to develop social and work-related skills that will enable them to capitalize on their experience once they have completed the program.

Many roles are necessary to make this program successful, and Program Director, Mallory Whitmore, gives a large portion of her energy and focus to the academic side of the experience. Classes for IDEAL students consist of traditional courses chosen in accordance with the student's personal interests, as well as IDEAL classes that are focused on translatable skills not covered in traditional courses, and Ms. Whitmore is at the head of the entire endeavor. "Lining up our students with classes that will benefit and interest them, as well as set them up for success, is not always an easy process," said Whitmore. "It takes work from both the student and faculty partners, and we have been very fortunate to work with great teachers on Lipscomb's campus."

When the students are not in class or enjoying time with friends, they're gaining invaluable career skills through internships at sites across our campus.

When students complete the IDEAL program, we want them to be prepared to seek and maintain gainful employment, allowing them to achieve that next level of independence. In order



A.T. Banks talking to peer mentor Dalton Keck in student center.

to help our students reach that goal, we solicit the help of internship site supervisors that play a vital role in guiding the students through the internship process. These mentors are full-time Lipscomb employees who work within the departments at each internship site, and act as the direct contact for each student when reporting in to work. From Safety and Security to the Registrar's Office to Beaman Library to Athletics, our students are active in their internships throughout each



Shayla Osborne and Alanna Johnson relaxing during Quest Week orientation.

in a moment's notice. Program Assistant, Kelly Blankenship, knows this better than anyone. Throughout each week, she manages the schedules of over 70 peer mentors in conjunction with the schedules of the IDEAL students. These peer mentors are traditional undergraduate students on Lipscomb's campus who volunteer their time to work one-on-one with IDEAL students, and spend that time studying, exercising, working on social skills, job coaching, eating lunch or just hanging out. The peer mentor component is vital to the daily functioning of IDEAL.

At Lipscomb, the focus of education is not merely to impart knowledge, but rather to do so in a loving, compassionate and beneficial way that will promote all of our students to reach the goals they have set for themselves. Shayla Osborne, one of the IDEAL program's newest students, has dreams of being a Spanish interpreter, and sees her experience at Lipscomb University as the next step in achieving that dream. "Being a part of IDEAL has given me more confidence in myself," Shayla expressed. "I'm expected to take care of my responsibilities here, and that has made me step up and make decisions more than I used to."

As Shayla looks to the future, she also recognizes that this experience is a blessing not all students will experience. "Coming to Lipscomb has been a pretty big deal for me and my family," said Shayla. "I know there were a lot of other

week, gaining and developing marketable skills, as well as those soft skills we all need to thrive in the workforce.

Keeping all the pieces of this machine running is a team effort, requiring everyone involved to be flexible and able to change direction

students that didn't get into this program, and I'm thankful that I did."

"We have a group of students that are eager to grow," said Dr. Misty Vetter Parsley, Faculty Advisor to the IDEAL program. "That eagerness and desire to be here can make all the difference in the world, and these students constantly impress us."

As we look to the future of the IDEAL program on Lipscomb University's campus, we are seeing more opportunities for growth - not only growth in number of students served, but growth in community. Former Senior Vice President and Dean of the College of Education Dr. Candice McQueen, saw this as only the beginning. "The IDEAL program has actually exceeded my expectations in its impact on the Lipscomb community," Dr. McQueen said. "Our original intent was to create a program that provided the best possible education for the IDEAL students with the expectations of employment at the program conclusion. This is certainly happening. Interestingly though, IDEAL is also providing an incredibly well-rounded education for all Lipscomb students. The community has embraced IDEAL as a natural part of our mission, and we see even more growth potential."

For these students who are paving the way, their legacy will set the stage for many cohorts to come. Their hard work and determination to succeed have already made them shining stars within the Lipscomb community.



Rashaad Harrell participating in a lab activity for his Nature Study biology class.

For more information regarding IDEAL, please visit www.lipscomb.edu/education/ideal-program.

The IDEAL program is partially funded by a grant from the TN Council on Developmental Disabilities, with generous support from the Sun Trust Foundation, The Memorial Foundation and Lipscomb's College of Education.

DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVE IS

PUTTING PEOPLE TO WORK

by Suzy Pruitt, Disability Resource Coordinator, South Central Tennessee Workforce Alliance



The Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) grant through the Tennessee Department of Labor has allowed five workforce areas in the state of Tennessee to work intensely with individuals with disabilities who are seeking employment. Tennessee was a recipient of the second round of DEI grants awarded by the U.S.

Department of Labor and has been working on this initiative for the past three years.

Through the DEI grant, the American Job Centers (AJC) in these five areas have significantly enhanced their abilities to provide effective job search assistance to a population that is often ignored. Tennessee jobseekers with a disability are unemployed at twice the rate of jobseekers who do not claim a disability. Through the use of Ticket to Work incentives, the Walgreen's REDI Program and the use of Integrated Resource Teams, the AJCs are helping to connect an increased number of job seekers with disabilities to jobs and careers where they can become self-sufficient.

Stories are flowing throughout the state of successes from the DEI experience. In West Tennessee, Jackie had been unemployed for roughly five years, and decided that the time was right for her to return to work. She sought assistance through the DEI grant and after being coached on her resume and interview skills, found a customer service position in a local department store. The Disability Resource Coordinator in that area will follow Jackie for the next year to make sure she is successful in her new position.

In Southern Middle Tennessee, Stephen is currently pursuing an entrepreneurial career as a massage therapist.

He lost his sight due to MS at the age of 21 and has obtained his license as a massage therapist. The local AJC staff through the DEI grant was able to help him purchase equipment



and is currently coaching him through the process of developing his own business. Also in Southern Middle Tennessee, Patrick has started his first job at a home improvement store. Patrick has William's Syndrome and his customer services skills are a great strength. Patrick was assisted in his job seeking by a coordinated effort through the AJC and Vocational Rehabilitation. He received some job coaching and is doing well in his new position. In

Tennessee jobseekers with a disability are unemployed at twice the rate of jobseekers who do not claim a disability.



that same county, Jesse, a young man with a traumatic brain injury, is working at a local retail outlet and will be receiving a job coach to help him learn new skills and maintain his position.

In Northern Middle Tennessee, Tyler, a gentleman who loves security work but had difficulty finding employment because he is blind and uses a service dog, is now employed in a security position at a large local employer. He just rolled out a new security program for his company. Tyler was able to prove his abilities to his new employer because the DEI team in that Workforce area worked as his advocate.

The current DEI round two grant came to an end on March 31, 2015. However, the services to those job seekers with disabilities will continue throughout Tennessee at a level never reached before in the American Job Centers. A great focus of the grant has been to train center staff, buy equipment and change programs to accommodate these individuals to level the playing field for services.





A Matter of Choice: A letter from a Partners grad

I would like to share a few thoughts about the Partners in Policymaking program. It has been a wonderful opportunity for me to learn and grow in my knowledge and understanding of people with disabilities.

Like so many people, I have to admit that I didn't give a great deal of thought to the lives of the disabled. I thought as long as they were fed and well taken care of by someone with compassion, that everything was fine.

Partners allowed me to see the world from a different perspective.

I thought my life experiences gave me a good outlook on the life of people with disabilities. I grew up with a first cousin who used a wheelchair all of my life. He did not have the use of his limbs. He lost the ability to speak or breathe on his own as he grew older. I never thought about his condition because he seemed to have a full life. He graduated from college, held a job, and traveled all over the country. It looked like a good life, for a person with a disability.

His mother/caregiver did her best to do everything in her power to make life all that it could be, and then some. Everyone in the family treated my cousin like the other two dozen cousins in the family. He went wherever the rest of us went, and he took part in as many activities as possible. However, I do recall that as he got older, he grew more irritable and short-tempered, especially with his mother.

Now I have some idea of why my cousin grew so angry with the people who loved him most but understood him least of all - he was never asked what he wanted. I know that they were doing the best they could, but it was always done on his behalf. Which is normal when you're a child, but the problem is, it never became my cousin's decision. Let me be clear, he was consulted on the small things, the simple decisions. If there was a question about mustard or catsup for his hotdog, then he was part of the discussion. But major life decisions were made for him. He had little to say about the college he attended, where he lived or whether or not he wanted to live his entire life in his childhood bedroom. The older he got, the madder he became.

I understand now how he must have felt. My cousin was a polio survivor from age three until his death at age 65 last year. I have been dealing with life as a person with a disability for only a few years, and already I've encountered the same well-meaning, over-protective help that I don't need or ask for from people who love me.

I am often told by friends that I need to slow down and let them catch up, because my blindness didn't just happen to me, but to my entire circle of friends and family. The adjustment period for me was short compared to the people around me.

My friends and family did not have the benefit of learning the valuable lessons of Partners. From the simple act of staying alone in a hotel room to standing in front of a room full of strangers and giving them a presentation, it all adds up to conquering the fear that comes with having a disability.

Sometimes you bump up against that fear by accident. You attempt to do something mundane, like sewing a button back on a blouse, and you discover that the skill you once had for the task is no longer sufficient. What used to take five minutes now requires a class on how the blind and slightly sighted have to sew.

Partners teaches that it's okay to do whatever needs to be done differently. Just as long as the task gets done.

Partners expanded my thinking to realize my cousin could have had a life of his own choosing, a life made of his choices. I have to admit that until I attended Partners, it never occurred to me that people with disabilities could make their own decisions or would want to do so. It appeared as though the best choices for his life were being made for him. No one in the family ever questioned whether he could think for himself.

But there was no problem with his mind. In fact, he often tutored other students and was seen as smarter than most of his peers. He broke a lot of barriers but he could not break out of the role the rest of the family put on him.

People mean well, but sometimes they see your life through the prism of their fears. Partners has taught me that with knowledge and planning, many things are possible. Not every idea is a great one, and it is ok and good to seek advice and information - but the choice of what to do is ultimately mine. My cousin was never treated like an adult, and he knew it.

Partners changed my way of thinking, by introducing me to people with disabilities who were in charge of their own lives. And despite the fears of others, they are being successful. These people are like everyone else in the world, with problems that they work out on their own.

Thanks for your attention,

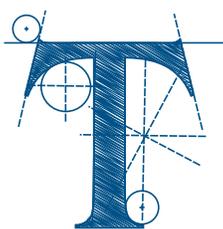
Lynn Jackson

ARCHITECTS FOR A DAY

“When is the next workshop?”

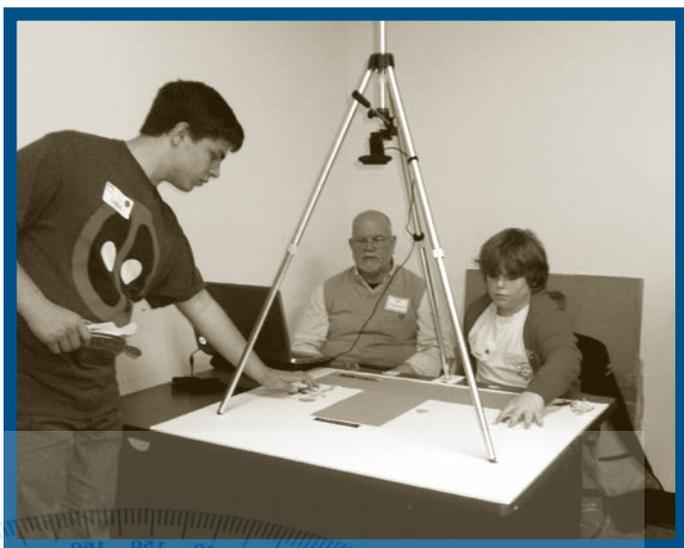
10-year-old Ryan Logan wondered after the Architecture and Animation Workshop he attended in March of 2014.

by Anne Winsauer



he workshop that so intrigued Ryan came about because VSA Tennessee and The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts were interested in the awareness young people with disabilities have of the function and form of

buildings around them, and about architecture as a career. To answer that question, they combined forces with my organization, Art for Autism Tennessee, to provide a day for students to learn in a hands-on way about specific structures and Tennessee architecture in general. The event also relied on assistance from architectural firm Earl Swensson Associates, Inc., and The American Institute of Architects of East Tennessee.



Logan Thompson and Jalyn Weston's stop-motion characters are digitally photographed by John Winsauer.

Six students with autism, ages 10 to 18, and one sibling gathered for the workshop at the Clayton Center for the Arts on the Maryville College campus

to learn about the construction, purposes, and functions of buildings, from single-story structures to skyscrapers. Each student had the unusual opportunity to play the role of an architect, moving between two classrooms filled with fun learning activities.



Hope McKee constructs sturdy trusses made only of gumdrops and toothpicks!

Upon the students' arrival, fact sheets were distributed about the three focus buildings: the Sunsphere in Knoxville; the AT&T Building (otherwise known as the Batman Building) and the Parthenon, both in Nashville. The group, which included parents and 13 Maryville College student volunteers, listened attentively while architect Leslie Fawaz gave an enlightening introduction to architectural principles. Ms. Fawaz shared vector graphic 3D computer models of homes and skyscrapers, taking the group on a virtual tour of each with the click of a mouse.

The day was designed to accommodate each student's learning style in a relaxed atmosphere. Participants received a checklist and schedule for the entire day, and each student was assigned to the Red or Blue Team. After receiving a construction helmet, the students took part in a variety of activities to help them comprehend the basics of building: foundation, structure, load-bearing walls and trusses, as well as the "skin" of a high-rise, which is often made up of glass panels with structural steel supports.

To help envision a skyscraper's great height, the concept of scale was tackled first. For these young designers, scale meant the ratio of the height of a drawing (or model) to the height of the actual AT&T Building. This was demonstrated on graph paper and on the wall model. On the graph paper, team members carefully marked off 30 squares to represent



Each student made a model of Knoxville's SunSphere.

30 floors of the skyscraper. Turning to the opposing wall, the group faced a 7.5 foot silhouette of the skyscraper with its 30 floors marked for "construction". Meanwhile, Bill Threlkeld, an architect with the Tennessee Valley Authority, taught construction techniques and engaged students in lively conversation while they worked on their models. Throughout all of these activities, social, physical and cognitive processes were getting a full workout!

Next, a single student laid the all-important horizontal foundation at the bottom of the AT&T Building model. Students took turns placing pieces of the building's vertical core, and adding each successive horizontal floor from the ground up. Skyscrapers, the group learned, contain services like elevators and restrooms within a supportive core structure. Mr. Threlkeld held a plumb line to represent the elevator shaft. When the model's "elevator" was in place, providing mobility and safety for the model's "occupants", the students added sticker-people representing the weight load to each well-supported floor. Then, the exterior panels were added and the model was finished. Several more projects followed this one.

Throughout the afternoon, a cluster of students and facilitators grouped around the animation center, which consisted of a tripod with a webcam facing downward toward a poster. Each student created a character from cardstock to "ride the elevator" using stop-motion animation. By placing their cardstock cutouts in a

series of poses, the students made their characters walk to, board, ride and exit the elevator. After recording each shot, the students could see the animation being created on a computer connected to the camera. After the workshop, each student received a DVD of the animation, time-lapse photography of the model building and photos of the day.



Architect, Bill Threlkeld, demonstrates elevator shaft technology on student-assembled AT&T building.

Finally, to create a better understanding of large-scale construction, Maryville College student volunteers provided one-on-one assistance as the Red and Blue Teams used 9-inch foam cubes to build structures matching images on cards. To boost visual recognition, the students drew a cityscape which included each individual's rendering of a building. Later, they built triangular trusses with gumdrops and toothpicks. They constructed the trusses making cube after cube until they had enough to build bridges strong enough to bear a load of pennies. Students also designed building complexes using tiny boxes, and capped off the day by crafting tiny SunSpheres to take home with them.

When asked what he had learned at the end of the all-day event, Ryan said, "I learned that an architect is a person who builds buildings!" The complexities of architecture, which had at first seemed like a huge challenge for Ryan, led to a very creative, personal experience for him, and, most likely, for all of Ryan's peers who attended that day.

Anne Winsauer is the owner-operator of Art for Autism Tennessee, LLC in Knoxville, Tennessee. You can view a video of the Architecture and Animation workshop at <http://youtu.be/Cnv36woTvR8> and <http://www.artforautismtn.com/2014-art-architecture-workshop/>.

Photos by Pam Weston and John Winsauer.

APPLICATIONS ARE NOW BEING ACCEPTED...



...for the 2015-16 Partners in Policymaking Leadership Institute. Partners is a free advocacy and leadership training initiative of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. Over the course of seven weekend sessions in September, October, November, January, February, March and April, accepted participants will learn about a wide range of disability topics from local and national experts in the disability field. The program is open to adults with disabilities and family members of persons with disabilities.



The deadline for applications for the 2015-16 class is April 30, 2015.
For more information about Partners or to request an application, please contact Ned Andrew Solomon at 615.532.6556 or by email at ned.solomon@tn.gov.



*Iseashia
& Desi
Thomas.*

by Ashley L. Annstedt,
UT Boling Center for Developmental Disabilities

TRAINING THE FRONT LINE: A DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES WORKSHOP FOR CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES

The University of Tennessee Boling Center for Developmental Disabilities Department of Social Work has a big task for 2015: training hundreds of Child Protective Service investigators across the state on developmental disabilities. Thousands of reports of child abuse and neglect are made to the Department of Children's Services yearly, and many of those children, or their parents, have developmental disabilities.

Prior to this collaboration, CPS staff have had very minimal opportunities to learn about the struggles, barriers and frustrations sometimes faced by families who experience disability. The BCDD Social Work department has had a long standing relationship with DCS and often receives calls from DCS staff asking about resources and recommendations for the children and families they are serving. Staff have questions such as, "Where can this parent go to better understand their child's disability?" and, "What types of services are expected for a child with this DD?" to more emergency matters like, "Who is best equipped to provide a forensic interview for a victim of sexual abuse who has autism and is non-verbal?" .

While considering how their department could collectively disseminate this information, the CPS Academy was brought to their attention. "While looking at the agenda for the CPS Academy last summer, we noticed that there was nothing disability related, although CPS staff work with children and parents with disabilities all the time!" said Malissa Duckworth, UT clinical social worker. "So, we immediately reached out to the Director of Training and Development at the Department of Children's Services and developed a proposal."

Although the CPS Academy was already planned and under way, DCS decided to present this training through their CPS continuing education sector. CPS staff will participate in a six-hour training that will provide an introduction to various developmental disabilities, applicable laws, People First language, best practices, family-centered care and lifespan issues. The training is primarily focused on children with developmental disabilities, but time is also devoted to adaptations when working with a parent who has a

developmental disability. Staff will also be put through a variety of case studies to increase their awareness on the complexities of disability and how it can impact their assessment and interactions with families.

In order to make it as dynamic and comprehensive as possible, the team videoed various UT staff discussing topics within their expertise. CPS staff will not just hear from clinical social workers, but will view recordings from the University's developmental pediatrician, psychologist, speech language pathologist, clinical nutritionist and psychiatrist.

Another, and perhaps the most valuable, piece of the experience is an in-person Q & A by a parent of a child with a disability. Iseashia Thomas, a parent of a child with autism and UT Family Discipline trainee, had the opportunity to speak to Memphis CPS staff at the kick-off training held in mid-September. "I hope that staff members were informed by my perspective and walked away with a desire to fully understand the challenges that come with every disability they encounter," said Ms. Thomas. "It would be so awesome if all divisions incorporated the family perspective in their training."

The pilot training in Memphis was well received, and very positive feedback was given from those staff that participated. It is the hope of the University that these experiences will better equip CPS staff to provide disability-informed assessment, family-centered care and appropriate resource referral. Trainings will be held in Chattanooga, Jackson, Nashville, and Knoxville, for a total of 16 trainings in 2015, with the goal of opening it up to community partners.



**Boling Center
DCS Training
Staff Ashley
Annstedt
and Malissa
Duckworth.**



INCREASING COMMUNITY ACCESSIBILITY:

TRIAD's

Community Engagement Initiative

by Lauren Weaver, M.S., BCBA

Visiting places in the community such as a baseball game, opera, or the zoo may seem like a distant dream for many families of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The stress and anxiety of balancing school and home could already be more than enough to discourage many families from trying something new in the community.

Our team at Vanderbilt Kennedy Center's Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders (TRIAD) wanted to increase community accessibility for families of individuals with ASD by raising awareness, engagement and building capacity at some of the most visited attractions in Middle Tennessee. We have been able to do this through our Organizational Engagement Program.

The idea

One of the programs housed in TRIAD's Community Engagement Initiative is our Families First Program. Families First began in 2008 as a free training opportunity for parents of young children recently diagnosed with ASD. We now host these workshops nine to twelve times a year on a variety of related subjects. Through this program, we give parents and caregivers a solid foundation with practical behavioral tools and strategies to support their children.

With a typical attendance of 30 to 50 participants, we've served approximately 3,000 parents and other caregivers since the program's inception. While parents were comfortable applying these tools and strategies at home with their child, they still expressed hesitation to go into the community. That's where the idea began; in an effort to help families feel



The local media showed up to cover our staff training at the Nashville Zoo at Grassmere.

comfortable navigating their own community, we initiated our Organizational Engagement Program in 2013 as a natural extension of Families First.

Partnering with established organizations

We first reached out to organizations with established arts, recreation and educational programs to partner with the goal of ensuring Nashville is a welcoming place for individuals with ASD and their families. Our current TRIAD Community Partners include Cheekwood Botanical Gardens and Museum of Art, Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, Frist Center for the Visual Arts, Nashville Children's Theatre, Nashville Opera, Nashville Public Library, Nashville Zoo at Grassmere, Tennessee Performing Arts Center (TPAC), YMCA of Middle Tennessee, and our



Opera artists during the first annual inclusive performance at the Nashville Opera in 2014.



The Online Resources Directory is a place where families can download and use any of the 50+ evidence-based resources for our TRIAD Community Partners. As an opportunity to showcase the newly developed supports and apply the information shared at the training, Nashville Zoo hosted its first Autism Awareness Day in April 2014. The day featured ASD-friendly activities, including games and interactions with live animals. The zoo also hosted Zooper Heroes, its first summer camp for children with disabilities. The camp provided playful opportunities to develop social skills and included many evidence-based practices to support a child's independence.

Upcoming plans and events

Campers posing for a group picture at the first Zooper Heroes Summer Camp in 2014.

two newest partners, Nashville Predators and Vanderbilt University Athletics. We work with these wonderful organizations to educate their staff about ASD and assist them in providing resources that make their venues more ASD-friendly and inclusive to all persons with developmental disabilities.

The Nashville Zoo at Grassmere is just one example of the great work our Community Partners are doing to increase community accessibility for families of children with ASD. The Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum and Cheekwood Botanical Gardens and Museum of Art have supports available for guests on their websites, and the Nashville Children's Theatre includes a sensory friendly performance of all its shows.

In February we were pleased to have the 2nd Annual Nashville Opera and TRIAD Partnership, a modified opera performance at the Noah Liff Opera Center. This operatic retelling of the classic children's fairy tale Jack and the Beanstalk teaches kids the timeless lesson of "The Golden Rule," through its family-friendly 45-minute production sung in English and set to music from the beloved operettas of Gilbert & Sullivan. This was an inclusive performance where families were invited to do whatever is necessary to make this experience more successful for the family, like take a break in the quiet space, or stand during the performance. Last year's inclusive performance of Billy Goat's Gruff was such a hit with children and their families, we were very excited to try it again!

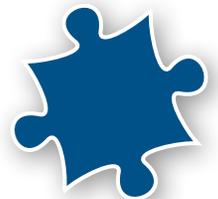
We also have many events scheduled during April, which is Autism Awareness Month, including an inclusive performance of Bleu! at TPAC. It is a 50-minute production on a magic carpet with built-in sensors, as the artists and children create colorful images amidst the sea-dwellers and mysterious ruins of ancient Greek legends.

For more information on upcoming events, please check the Events Calendar on our website at <http://vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/vkc/triad/ceievents/> or email TRIADOutreach@vanderbilt.edu.

Here's an example. As our city's most-visited tourist attraction, Nashville Zoo at Grassmere was a perfect partner to spearhead our outreach program. The Zoo has been a leader in making progress toward the goals of the partnership.

We conducted a six-hour training for zoo keepers, education staff and guest services, including a brief overview of ASD and ways to incorporate evidence-based practices to provide a better experience to individuals and families impacted by ASD. You could say they "ran away" with the information.

Following the training, we developed Social Stories™ for some challenging situations, such as waiting in line or petting an animal, as well as a general Social Story to help prepare a child for a typical visit to the zoo. All three stories are available in English and Spanish and in two versions accommodating varying language levels. The supports are available on Nashville Zoo's accessibility page on their website at <http://www.nashvillezoo.org/accessibility>, as well as TRIAD's Online Resources Directory, at <http://vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/vkc/triad/ceiresources/>.





with John Harris

John Harris retired in 2013 after 28 years as Director of Disabled Student Services at MTSU. Born in 1949 in Munford, Tennessee, Harris has been blind since birth, and was one of eight children.

He attended high school at the Tennessee School for the Blind in Donelson, and went to college and graduate school at Middle Tennessee State University where he majored in psychology. John was actively involved in the network of college disability service providers, and frequently spoke to youth with disabilities about

what they needed to be thinking about, and how they needed to be advocating for themselves as they transitioned from high school to college and adulthood.

John is also a graduate of the Council's Partners in Policymaking Leadership Institute. Breaking Ground had the opportunity to speak with John recently about his career.

BG: How difficult was it growing up

without vision? Were your parents, siblings and friends supportive?

JH: It wasn't that difficult to me. My family was both supportive and protective. I may have been the only visually impaired person anywhere close to where I lived. I remember that my siblings could do things that I wasn't allowed to do, like go places at night by themselves. They treated me differently than the rest of my siblings.

BG: What jobs did you have before becoming director of Disability Services at MTSU?

JH: My first job was at the Veterans Administration. I worked there for about five years before being hired as the Director of Disabled Student Services at MTSU. There was someone serving students with disabilities at MTSU before I was hired, but those services were being provided by a graduate assistant at the time.

BG: What was the attitude of the University toward students with disabilities when you first began?

JH: MTSU was accepting. They relied on me more for information on how to assist individuals with disabilities.

BG: How, if at all, did this attitude evolve over your time there?

JH: As more students came and the more successful our students - and even I - became, the acceptance grew even more. Staff knowledge of what students needed, and the willingness to provide, it also grew.

BG: Were there many battles to be fought in this job to make sure that students had the accommodations they needed?

JH: I've always enjoyed working with teams and providing opportunities for students through building relationships. So, I never really looked at my work in that way - as a battle to be fought. As I built those relationships through the years, through serving on committees and helping people when there wasn't necessarily anything in it for me or the students, people got to know me and wanted to help when I had a request.

“ MTSU was one of the first universities in the state to have a program. I think I was able to help foster an environment where we could all consult on problems. I always wanted to help other schools solve problems and serve students, instead of competing with them. ”

BG: How did your position change over the years?

JH: Our staff increased and the student population increased dramatically. As other institutions began to hire someone to do the same job as me, our student population declined.

BG: Have you been able to influence the college disability services system in general in Tennessee?

JH: Yes, MTSU was one of the first universities in the state to have a program. I think I was able to help foster an environment where we could all consult on problems. I always wanted to help other schools solve problems and serve students, instead of competing with them.

BG: What are some of your proudest achievements in this area?

JH: I have always said that “I get my kicks” when students with disabilities graduate and are able to become employed.

BG: What have been some of your biggest challenges?

JH: The biggest challenge was increasing access to information for myself and the students.

BG: Have the knowledge and skills of the students who used your services changed over the years? Are students smarter now when they first come in needing

accommodations, or do they have the same issues that you’ve seen since the beginning?

JH: Both. I think some things have changed and improved and some challenges will always be there in some form. I’m very impressed with the growth in technology and all the things that I and other people with disabilities can now do because of technology that were never possible before. I used to hire someone to read the newspaper to me. It was an amazing day when I learned to use JAWS (Job Access with Speech) and the Internet and could read the newspaper without assistance.

BG: What will you miss the most about not doing this work anymore?

JH: Well, I feel like I’m still involved in assisting individuals with disabilities even though I’ve left the University. I’m still involved with different boards and projects in the area. I’ve also been able to endow the John L. Harris Scholarship. Once a year, the Disability Access Center at MTSU chooses a student with a disability to receive the \$1,000 scholarship. The student can use the funds for two semesters.

“ I used to hire someone to read the newspaper to me. It was an amazing day when I learned to use JAWS (Job Access with Speech) and the Internet and could read the newspaper without assistance. ”

BG: Lastly, as a retired person, do you have any significant short and long term goals?

JH: Well, I’m not sure I can really answer that at this point because I didn’t stay retired for long! I returned to work on a part-time basis as the Executive Director of the Statewide Independent Living Council.

BG: Thank you for your time!

TO CONSERVATORSHIP OR NOT TO CONSERVATORSHIP

by **Cindy Gardner, Attorney, Maurer & Gardner, PLLC** and **Carrie Guiden, Executive Director, The Arc TN**

Many parents are surprised that when their child with a disability turns 18 (the age of majority in Tennessee), they no longer have the legal right to make decisions for their child, regardless of the child's disability. Parents typically learn this information through the school system, which is required to tell them on their child's seventeenth birthday that the "transfer of rights" will occur when he/she turns eighteen. For the purposes of the education system, this generally means that the child will make his/her own decisions in the IEP meetings.

It is at this point that parents are often introduced to the term "conservatorship". But conservatorships are about much more than IEP decisions. The pros and cons of seeking conservatorship must be carefully considered. The appointment of a conservator is a serious matter. It limits a person's rights. Conservatorship is NOT mandatory for a person with a disability, and it should not be done simply for convenience.

However, in some situations, establishing conservatorship is the best way to protect a vulnerable individual. There is no "magic formula". As with everything in the disability field, the decision should be based on the individual's abilities, needs and rights. It is also important to note that there are strongly differing perspectives on conservatorship within the disability community. Some people believe that decision-making for an adult with a disability should always be overseen by the court to keep the person safe and to protect him/her from conflicting interests. Others focus on preservation of rights, self-determination and natural supports.

WHAT IS CONSERVATORSHIP?

Tennessee Statute defines a conservatorship as "a proceeding in which a court removes the decision-making powers and duties, in whole or in part, in a least restrictive manner, from a person with a disability who lacks capacity to make decisions in one or more important areas and places responsibility for one or more of those decisions in a conservator or co-conservators".

So, a conservatorship is a Court Order that allows a parent (or other family member) to continue to be make certain decisions for their child, sibling or parent with a disability. A Court Order is obtained when a lawyer files a Petition for Conservatorship

in the county where the child resides and gets a court hearing. Attached to the conservatorship petition is a Medical Affidavit, signed by the child's M.D. or Psychologist which states they have examined the person within 90 days, describes the disability or medical history, a description of the nature and scope of the disability, an opinion as to whether a conservator is needed, and the type and scope of the conservator with a specific statement of the reasons for the recommendation of conservatorship.

After the petition is filed, the court decides whether to appoint (or waive the appointment) of a Guardian ad Litem (GAL). A GAL is an attorney appointed by the judge who has a duty to the court to impartially investigate the facts and report them to the court. They are agents for the court, and not advocates for the person for whom conservatorship is sought. A court may waive the appointment of a GAL if in the best interests of the person. Most courts will waive this requirement.

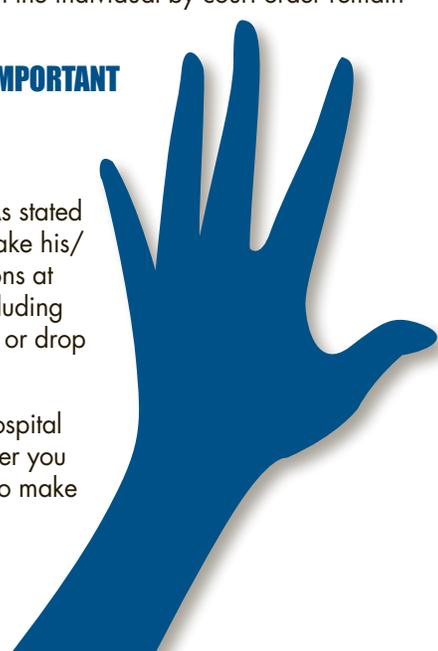
The court then holds a short hearing and the proposed conservator(s) are appointed, take an oath, and receive Letters of Conservatorship giving them the authority to act on behalf of their family member with a disability.

The court order spells out the areas of authority that the conservator is granted. This authority should always be limited to the "least restrictive alternative" for the individual, and any rights NOT removed from the individual by court order remain with him/her.

WHAT DECISIONS ARE IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER IN A CONSERVATORSHIP?

Educational decisions - As stated earlier, your child can make his/her own IEP team decisions at age 18 and beyond, including whether to stay in school or drop out.

Medical decisions - A hospital or doctor may ask whether you have the legal authority to make





medical decisions for your child. Some will not allow parents to review their child's records or speak to insurance companies on his/her behalf.

Financial decisions – Most parents will already be the representative payee of their child's Social Security benefits, so a conservatorship over the child's "estate" may not be necessary if he/she has no other assets or funds.

ARE THERE ALTERNATIVES TO CONSERVATORSHIP?

There is a movement in the disability field called Supported Decision-Making (SDM) that offers an opportunity for many adults with disabilities to make their own decisions, consistent with fundamental human and legal rights. SDM is a process in which adults who need assistance with decision-making – for instance, some people with disabilities - receive the help they need and want to understand the situations and choices they face, so they can make life decisions for themselves, without the need for undue or overbroad conservatorship

SDM generally occurs when people receive assistance from one or more trusted friends, family members, professionals or advocates, to help them understand the situations they face and choices and options they have, so they can make their own decisions. This process mirrors what happens for most adults when they make decisions such as whether to get car repairs, sign legal documents and consent to medical procedures: they seek advice, input and information from friends, family or professionals who are knowledgeable about those issues, so they can make their own well-informed choices.

For families that want to work within an SDM construct but still want some "tools" to provide some support, there are some options to consider. One such option is a Durable Power of Attorney (DPOA). A DPOA is a legal document that gives someone authority to make decisions on behalf of another individual. It may be given for healthcare, financial or educational decision-making (after the child turns 18), must be in writing and be notarized. In order for a DPOA to be valid, the person must be considered competent at the time he/she signs the document. A person with significant intellectual disabilities may not understand what a DPOA does. In those

cases, the person would likely be considered incompetent and the DPOA would not be valid.

Other tools include acting as representative payee, in which the person designated in this role manages the government checks of the person with the disability, and joint bank accounts, where a designated individual shares responsibility for the bank account with the person who has the disability. In both instances, it is imperative that it is a trusted individual designated in these roles or the person with a disability can be taken advantage of financially.

A special needs trust can protect money or property from being mismanaged. Again, it is critical that a trusted individual be designated as trustee.

With regard to health care, a living will or healthcare directive can be helpful in guiding medical professionals. A properly signed and witnessed document should be honored by medical professionals. In Tennessee, the Health Care Decisions Act allows a physician to assign a health care surrogate to make health care decisions for an individual in the event that he/she cannot. Ideally, the health care surrogate is someone who knows the person very well.

WHAT DECISION IS RIGHT FOR YOUR FAMILY?

There is no "one size fits all" answer to whether or not a person with a disability needs a conservator. It is a decision that requires careful thought and consideration. The pros and cons of each option must be reviewed. However, there are two common threads that run through both conservatorships and supported decision-making:

1. The people in the role of supporting that individual either as conservator, through durable power of attorney, representative payee, joint bank account, or any other method must be trustworthy. People with disabilities who require this level of support are considered "vulnerable individuals" and can be taken advantage of. There is no 100% foolproof protection from bad things happening to a person with a disability as a result of him/her being taken advantage of, and things can happen to people without disabilities as well.
2. When a person with a disability is surrounded by a strong network of people committed to supporting that person to make sound decisions, good things happen for that person. The "tool" chosen is unique for each family but the end result should be the same: decisions driven by the person's abilities, needs and rights.

For more detailed information on conservatorship and alternatives to conservatorship, download a copy of "Conservatorship and Alternatives to Conservatorship" available on The Arc Tennessee's website at: http://www.thearcn.org/Assets/Docs/Conservatorship_Handbook.pdf or call Cindy Gardner at The Law Firm of Maurer & Gardner, PLLC at 615.509.4677.

TN SPOTLIGHT



New Executive Board Members

Partners 2013-14 grad, Stephanie Jones, and current Partner, Jon McLaughlin, are now executive board members of the Tennessee Association of Blind Athletes (TNABA)-Memphis, a program that was started in Middle Tennessee by another Partners 2010-11 graduate, Ricky Jones. TNABA is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that provides sports and recreational activities for blind or visually impaired men, women and children of Tennessee.

2014 Governor's Volunteer Stars Award



Knox County community volunteer, Margaret Brackins, has been chosen as the recipient for the 2014 Governor's Volunteer Stars Awards for Knox County. The Governor's Volunteer Stars Awards is an initiative from Volunteer Tennessee that seeks to recognize outstanding volunteers from each of Tennessee's 95 counties. Margaret volunteers with Knox

County Mobile Meals and Volunteer Assisted Transportation on a weekly basis and completed over 800 hours of volunteer services in 2014, and over 1,800 hours since she began volunteering in 2012. The recipients of the 2014 Governor's Volunteer Stars Awards gathered in Franklin in early March, 2015 to be honored and to celebrate volunteerism in Tennessee.

Person-Centered Excellence Accreditation

SRVS has been awarded the four-year national Person-Centered Excellence Accreditation from CQL (The Council on Quality and Leadership). CQL is an internationally recognized accreditation body and not-for-profit leader in the definition, measurement, and improvement of quality of life for people with disabilities. In addition, SRVS staff member, Adrian Walker, was the winner of the 2014 TNCO Award for the category of Outstanding Direct Support Professional for West Tennessee. Adrian was recognized for his work in supporting Partners grad, Adrian Starks, in fulfilling his life-long dream of becoming a graduate of the City of Memphis Citizens Police Academy, and for his many accomplishments as a Montessori Lead at SRVS Learning Center.

2014 Annual Awards of Excellence

The Tennessee Community Network of Organizations celebrated the 2014 Annual Awards of Excellence last August in Nashville. At this event, Valarie Hawkins of Buffalo River Services won for Outstanding Direct Support Provider of Middle Tennessee for 2014. The nominees for this award must be individuals who have provided exemplary support services during the past 12 months to one or more clients, and requires a minimum of two years' experience in the community provider network.

2014 George S. Jesien Distinguished Achievement Award

Dr. Fred Palmer, Director of the Boling Center on Developmental Disabilities at UT Memphis, was named recipient of the 2014 George S. Jesien Distinguished Achievement Award. This is the most prestigious award given by the Association of University Centers on Disabilities. For over 40 years, Dr. Palmer has made significant and sustained contributions to people with disabilities and their families across the areas of research, education, service and community collaboration.



Emily Bowlan, daughter of Partners 2009-10 graduate Connie Bowlan, was crowned the 2015 Bartlett High School Winterfest Queen in early February. Emily has a busy schedule – she is a member of Best Buddies, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, the sign language club and an active participant with the Special Olympics.

The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. A special website celebrating its 50 years of opening doors and transforming lives through discovery, service, and training is now live at <http://vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/vkc/50/>. It has also been an award-winning time for several of the Center's staff members. VKC Director Elisabeth Dykens, PhD, was awarded the inaugural Research Award from NADD, an association for persons with developmental disabilities and mental health needs.

Lynnette Henderson, PhD, received Autism Tennessee's 2014 Volunteer of the Year Award. Henderson is the VKC research recruitment coordinator, associate director of adult community services for the VKC University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities and research assistant professor of pediatrics.

Elise McMillan, JD, received the Mollie Burd Gavigan Service Award of the Down Syndrome Association of Middle Tennessee. McMillan is co-director of the VKC UCEDD, director of community outreach and senior associate in psychiatry.

VKC investigator **Zachary Warren, PhD**, was honored with the 2014 Young Professional Award at the 2014 Association of University Centers on Disability (AUCD) Conference held in Washington, D.C. Warren is associate professor of pediatrics, psychiatry and special education and is director of the Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders (TRIAD) and Vanderbilt University Medical Center's Autism Clinical Services.

Bob Kibler: A Dedicated Advocate

by Linda Judeich, Executive Director,
Nashville Technology Access Center

The disability community recently lost one of its greatest advocates with the passing of Bob Kibler. Bob was born in Pennsylvania but claimed Florida as “home” since his family moved there when he was nine. Yearning for warm weather was a topic of conversation frequently for him, especially during the cold months of the year. Even so, he lived in Tennessee for over 25 years.

Bob earned Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees from the University of South Florida which began a lifetime of dedication and action to help individuals with disabilities. His career took him around the Southeast in a variety of jobs focusing on the education of children with disabilities. He was known and well respected in Florida, Georgia, Alabama and Kentucky for his work with pioneer programs for preschool children with disabilities.

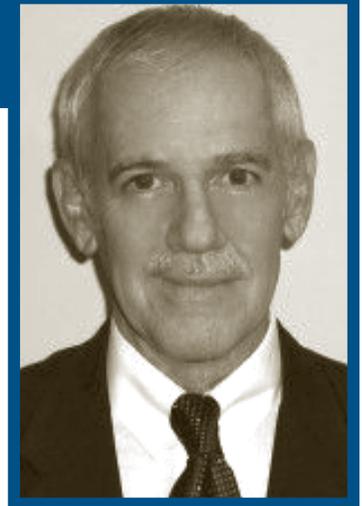
In the late 1980s, Bob landed in Nashville where he worked for United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) of Middle Tennessee. While there he learned about assistive technology and saw the potential for the amazing things it could do for people with disabilities. He worked with clients of UCP and their parents to explore technology and what it had to offer the disability community. He gathered a group and formed a board for Access Services of Middle Tennessee, the parent organization for the Technology Access Center (TAC), founded in August 1989.

In the beginning, TAC had very little money. What we had was Bob’s belief that assistive technology could benefit the disability community in remarkable ways. Initially, “staff” consisted of Bob and four volunteers. The volunteers had a great time trying to construct technology solutions and tossing around ideas with the limited amount of technology we had. Bob spent his time quietly in the corner pecking away on his little Macintosh computer keyboard.

After about six months, there was no money coming in. There was only Bob, four volunteers, two Macintosh computers, one Apple 2e computer, a Unicorn Board and an adaptive firmware card – very early assistive technology products. The volunteers continued to explore with the limited technology resources; Bob continued to apply for funding.

That’s the way Bob was. He preferred working out of the limelight, but his work allowed others with the resources needed to provide services to people with disabilities. His

diligence paid off when he received federal funding for a project. That was the beginning of TAC’s growth that continued for 25 years. There were bumps along the way, but with Bob’s leadership, TAC progressed and expansion continued.



Since Bob’s death on September 21, staff members and friends have provided comfort for each other through stories and memories. A lot of adjectives to describe Bob come to mind. Kind, compassionate and loyal are some of the words that staff members mentioned the most.

He was a dedicated advocate for people with disabilities and passionate in his belief in the benefits of assistive technology.

He was generous. During some early tight budget times, Bob kept TAC running by using his own money. Other times he took a pay reduction so that the staff could get small raises. That’s dedication!

Bob was very determined or even stubborn at times. When he perceived an injustice in services to people with disabilities, he could be very outspoken and would stand his ground to make sure his point of view was heard.

He was witty but not in a stand-up comic kind of way. His humor was smart and dry, but at times hilarious.

Bob was a thinker and was always pondering new ways to provide or improve services to those in need of technology.

He was caring and giving. Bob sometimes offered to provide personal care assistance if a friend needed help with daily living activities. Many times, even after a full day at work, Bob would go to help someone without an attendant to eat dinner or even help with dressing and other personal care tasks. He was a true friend.

There are many more adjectives to describe Bob Kibler. Much more space would be needed to fully “capture” him and his works. He was a remarkable man who led by example to foster support and services for people with disabilities. I’m proud to have called Bob my friend. He is missed.

Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities

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